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TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

[1](#)1. Upcoming Bush-Sharon Meeting

[1](#)2. Mideast

Key stories in the media:

The leading media carried reports on the Gaza Strip incident of 9 April in which three Palestinian youths were killed by IDF fire, after which Katif Bloc settlements were bombarded with some 80 mortars and Qassam rockets that caused no damage. Ha'aretz reported (10 April) that the Israeli security forces fear the incidents might lead to an escalation in the Gaza Strip area. Defense Minister Mofaz reportedly called PA Chairman Abu-Mazen and told him that Israel would not reconcile itself to the deterioration of the situation.

Ha'aretz reported on 10 April that the U.S. State Department advised American citizens to "carefully weigh" travel to Israel and defer any unnecessary trips to the territories. Israel's ambassador in Washington Dan Ayalon said on Friday that the modified warning is "a positive step. We hope it will lead to the warning's complete cancellation." Israeli officials said the State Department's advice to American travelers should reflect the improved security in Israel in the past few months. They said there is no reason for Israel to continue suffering from reduced tourism when the safety risk has been significantly reduced.

Yediot Aharonot cited Israeli intelligence sources (10 April) as assessing that Hamas has been drafting documents with excuses for future terror attacks, believing that the organization is preparing to resume the fire. The sources estimated that, contrary to previous assessments, Gaza Strip Palestinians have many Strela rockets. On 11 April, Ha'aretz reported that the Egyptians arrested a Palestinian who admitted under questioning that he smuggled Soviet-made surface-to-air Strela missiles into Gaza through Sinai.

On 11 April, Yediot Aharonot reported that, preparing to prevent a violent confrontation, the army the security forces will collect all the IDF weapons in the possession of the settlers in northern Samaria some two weeks before the disengagement. Residents of the Katif Bloc will also be required to hand over their weapons, but only a day before leaving their homes. The IDF has promised that there will be tighter security around the settlements during evacuation, and that the settlers will remain without weapons.

Ha'aretz reported (11 April) that a senior Central Command officer as saying that there will be no change to the legal status of the territory from which Israel will be evacuating four settlements. The source added he would recommend demolishing the buildings 'if there is nobody to hand them over to.'

All media on 10 April carried banner headlines regarding the expected demonstrations on the Temple Mount, expressing fears of a conflagration. On 11 April, however, the media reported that 31 Jews and eight Palestinians were detained as Temple Mount events passed quietly. In related anti-disengagement rallies, Ha'aretz reported on 11 April that 33 right-wing activists, including two minors, were arrested yesterday after blocking traffic in both directions on the Ayalon Highway in Tel Aviv. As in previous cases,

their action was organized to protest the disengagement plan.

Yediot Aharonot (11 April) cited Israeli diplomatic sources as fearing that a new prayer for Pollard's release, written by the IDF chief rabbi, might provoke a diplomatic incident while Sharon is in the U.S.

"An American Helicopter, Israeli Brain" Maariv headlined when reporting about the festive ceremony held in Mitzpe Ramon on Sunday to welcome the first three Longbow helicopters from the U.S. The paper noted that the huge amount of money that was invested in the project came mostly from the U.S. security assistance.

1. Upcoming Bush-Sharon Meeting:

Summary:

Left-leaning, independent Ha'aretz editorialized: "No bitter surprises are believed to await Sharon in Crawford.... Although the evacuation from Gaza is less than all that is needed, it must first be assured that it happens."

Yahad-Meretz Party head Yosi Beilin writes in left-leaning, independent Ha'aretz: "The only question is how serious Bush takes the commitment he took upon himself -- to assist in bringing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to an end. During his first term in office, he contributed very little to advance this process. In his second term, he still has a period of grace."

Washington-based correspondent Orli Azulay-Katz writes in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "When an American president is friendly, he expects something in return and will not settle for a vague declaration."

Washington-based correspondent Nathan Gutman wrote in left-leaning, independent Ha'aretz: "The administration does not expect to solve the settlement issue today.... That message is that despite the support for disengagement and the April 14, 2004 letter from Bush to Sharon, the issue of the settlement construction is not over, and the settlement freeze is still a matter of contention."

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in left-leaning, independent Ha'aretz: "It appears that Sharon's festive visit with Bush will become yet another chapter in the tiresome bickering and infinite search for the culprits in the breakdown of the process."

Block Quotes:

1. "The Focus, According to Bush"

Left-leaning, independent Ha'aretz editorialized (April 10): "No bitter surprises are believed to await Sharon in Crawford.... The Americans are now working on two parallel tracks. The Palestinians are being required, at the direction of General William Ward, to unify their security services and reform their administration. From Sharon, 'the father of the settlements' in the words of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, the demand is simple: translate words into deeds, and see to it that in the summer of 2005 not one Israeli, soldier or settler, remains in Gaza. That is the focus. All the rest -- outposts, Ma'aleh Adumim, construction in population centers -- is outside the scope of the lens. Bush is right in his approach. Presidents who believed they had accomplished a great deal with their demands found out they had actually accomplished nothing. Although the evacuation from Gaza is less than all that is needed, it must first be assured that it happens."

2. "If Bush Is Really Serious"

Yahad-Meretz Party head Yosi Beilin writes in left-leaning, independent Ha'aretz (April 10): "No one knows when the second stage of the road map is supposed to start, but it is clear to everyone that it leads to a potential confrontation.... Bush can untangle this knot. The U.S. should demand of Sharon that he fulfill his commitments regarding the unauthorized outposts and a settlement freeze. He should also be asked to define exactly what the legal status of northern Samaria will be after the settlements are evacuated from that area. Bush, on his part, can give both sides an updated

timetable for the road map.... In light of the fact that violations by both sides constitute one of the central problems in the implementation of the road map, it is important for Bush to establish the international monitoring mechanism that is stipulated in the road map but that has never been established.... The only question is how serious Bush takes the commitment he took upon himself -- to assist in bringing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to an end. During his first term in office, he contributed very little to advance this process. In his second term, he still has a period of grace."

13. "The Price of Friendship"

Washington-based correspondent Orli Azulay-Katz writes in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: (April 10) "With their declarations yesterday that construction in the territories will continue, Sharon and his cabinet members spoiled the festive mood.... This is actually the reason why, when flying back from Rome to Texas, President Bush used no uncertain terms to disperse opacity and said he will unequivocally tell Sharon in private that which he had said in public: a total freeze of the settlements. When an American president is friendly, he expects something in return and will not settle for a vague declaration."

14. "Settlement Freeze vs. Settlements Please"

Washington-based correspondent Nathan Gutman wrote in left-leaning, independent Ha'aretz (April 11): "Bush is not looking for a crisis with Sharon. The Israeli officials correctly diagnosed the main purpose of the meeting: to help Sharon execute the disengagement and to encourage him to cooperate with the Palestinians. Thus, Bush is careful with his criticism.... The administration does not expect to solve the settlement issue today. From that perspective, indeed, the issue is raised for the protocol, but the fact that the U.S. constantly reiterates its criticism is an important message for Israel. That message is that despite the support for disengagement and the April 14, 2004 letter from Bush to Sharon, the issue of the settlement construction is not over and the settlement freeze is still a matter of contention. It might not be something either side wants to fight over right now, but it is certainly on the agenda and is waiting for the day after the departure from Gaza."

15. "Another Chapter of Tiresome Bickering"

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (11 April): "Sharon's visit was planned as a public relations exercise, as a show of support on the part of President George W. Bush for the prime minister and his disengagement plan. There isn't much personal chemistry between Sharon and Bush, but they need one another.... The Americans wanted to urge Sharon to make more gestures to strengthen Abbas; the Israeli side wants to speak to the Americans about scenarios to deal with Abbas' expected downfall.... And so it appears that Sharon's festive visit with Bush will become yet another chapter in the tiresome bickering and infinite search for the culprits in the breakdown of the process."

12. Mideast:

Summary:

Military correspondent Alex Fishman wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Since there is no Israeli policy, and we have no red lines.... each round will be more aggressive than the previous one, and disengagement will no longer be quiet and coordinated."

Mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot editorialized: "The cost and damage of a mass destruction [of settlers' houses] move incredibly exceeds its benefits, if there are any."

Block Quotes:

1. "No Policy"

Military correspondent Alex Fishman wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (April 11): "IDF lookouts spotted at least some of the launching points of the Kassam rockets and mortar shells that were fired over the weekend towards Gush Katif. But we decided

not to attack the launching points. To show restraint.... The lack of response represents the third option: There is simply no policy. For we have not yet decided what we want from ourselves and from the Palestinian Authority. The Israeli government has not yet decided how exactly it is disengaging from the Gaza Strip -- with coordination or unilaterally, will we raze [the settlers' homes] or will we not? It has no red lines in the activity against the Palestinians. It has not even decided yet how to treat this phenomenon known as Abu Mazen. Will a [military] response to mortar shell fire weaken or strengthen him? It has been a long time since the Israeli intelligence agencies were so upset and divided over an issue as over the question: Who are you, Abu Mazen?.... Since there is no Israeli policy, and we have no red lines, it remains only to wait for the next round of rampaging. They will already come up with reasons on their own. If Israel does not employ means of reining them in -- each round will be more aggressive than the previous one, and disengagement will no longer be quiet and coordinated."

12. "Do Not Destroy"

Mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot editorialized (April 10): "Only some 25 percent of the Israeli public are in favor of the deliberate demolition of settlers' houses during the evacuation. Three quarters would rather see positive solutions that leave the houses in place. This has also been the consistent recommendation of the defense establishment and its head, Defense Minister Mofaz.... The cost and damage of a mass destruction move incredibly exceeds its benefits, if there are any. Many of the Gaza evacuees may sadly watch how their homes are given to an international organization and then to the Palestinians, but their grief cannot be the only political yardstick of the GOI policy."

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